

#224: MAY 2017 • INDYPENDENT.ORG

# THE INDYPENDENT

**OMAR EL AKKAD ON  
FOSSIL FUELS AND  
AMERICA'S SECOND  
CIVIL WAR, PI10**

**FIGHTING CLIMATE  
CHANGE IN THE AGE OF  
TRUMP, PI12**

**RECLAIMING AMERICA  
PI14**

**AND MORE...**

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**AGAINST  
DYSTOPIA**  
COVERAGE STARTS PAGE 9





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**MOVEMENT BUILDING**

# AFTER THE PEOPLE'S CLIMATE MARCH

BY NANCY ROMER

Tens of thousands of people will participate in the April 29 People's March for Climate, Jobs and Justice in Washington, D.C., or in one of hundreds of sister marches being held around the country. This will be a moment when we loudly and collectively say "No!" to the disastrous policies of a rogue president and the Congress. However, the true measure of the march is what we do next.

Here in New York, we have broad and diverse coalitions that are rolling up their sleeves and getting to work, aware that victories we achieve here in the city will resonate far beyond its borders. Many look toward reforms, some toward a new vision of a society that cares for its people and planet, but all know the importance of building a mass movement to address climate change. Here are some important events to plug into immediately following the march, empowering the movement in its many forms.

A NYC Accountability Forum will be held on May 16, organized by the People's Climate Movement-New York and a variety of climate, jobs and justice groups. This will be a mass people's interview of our three citywide officials — Mayor Bill de Blasio, Public Advocate Letitia James and Comptroller Scott Stringer — about climate action we can take right now here in the city. The event will also be an organizing forum where you can get information about, and join, ongoing campaigns on the issues the event will focus on:

- *Creating good jobs to cut our city's climate pollution by requiring all buildings to reach modern energy efficiency standards.*
- *Divesting our city's pension funds from fossil fuels and pipelines, and reinvesting into renewable energy (wind and solar), good local jobs, and benefits for low- and moderate-income communities of color.*
- *Transforming the city's commercial waste industry in NYC to reduce inefficiencies, create good jobs, improve air quality for overburdened communities and move closer to zero waste goals by increasing diversion from landfills.*

Divestment by pension funds can significantly weaken the power and political influence of the fossil fuel industry. New York City's \$165 billion pension funds, which are managed by Comptrol-



ROBERT VAN WAARDEN/SURVIVAL MEDIA AGENCY

ler Scott Stringer, have already divested from coal assets. The comptroller is now researching the current status of oil and gas investments. We are pushing the city to divest its investments in Wells Fargo and other financial institutions funding the Dakota Access Pipeline.

As part of a Global Divestment Mobilization, there will be a Divestment Bill Lobby Day in Albany on May 8, and there will be a series of activities in New York City including Divest NY's May 9 noon, teach-in and demonstration at Trump Tower, and a demonstration to Defund the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) on May 13 at noon in Union Square.

Climate battles are being fought across New York State. New York Renews, a coalition of more than 100 labor, community and environmental groups, is currently pushing Gov. Andrew Cuomo and state legislators to pass the landmark Climate and Community Protection Act that would move our state to 100 percent clean, renewable energy, protect frontline communities, support workers in a transition to the new energy economy and make polluters pay their fair share. Text "NYRenews" to 52886 and the governor and legislators will get a message from you. To join a strategy call with campaign leaders on May 9, see nyrenews.org.

In addition to passing legislation, we need to stop the building of more fossil fuel infrastructure in New York and speed up the growth of renewable energy sources, especially offshore wind. For the former, visit [youareheremap.org](http://youareheremap.org) to see an online and interactive map of fracking infrastructure and connect directly to grassroots communities that are fighting these projects. Over on Long Island, the largest wind farm in the United States will open in 2021. On May 24 there will be a rally at the Long Island Power Authority urging support for a second larger offshore wind farm. For more information visit [winwindny.org](http://winwindny.org).

The Peoples Climate Movement-NY is meeting on May 23 to engage and move forward our vibrant movement. Watch [newyork.peoplesclimate.org](http://newyork.peoplesclimate.org) for more information. We are building a movement together, with broad politics and many approaches; find a way to contribute and dig in.

Nancy Romer is a member of People's Climate March-New York.

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# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

# MAY



RALPH STEADMAN

**THRU SUN MAY 14**

7:30PM • \$35–\$59

**THEATER: UNFRAMED: AN IMMIGRANT IN PROGRESS**

From his idyllic early life in Antigua to his arrival in America at age 11, his struggles with racism and finding his voice for change, Iyaba Ibo Mandingo paints a striking and meaningful portrait of his search for self in this tour-de-force solo show.

Elektra Theatre

300 W 43rd St

**FRI MAY 5**

8PM • \$50–\$75

**PERFORMANCE: THE KENTUCKY DERBY IS DECADENT AND DEPRAVED**

Director Chloe Webb and the legendary artist Ralph Steadman bring Hunter S. Thompson's first gonzo journalism piece (and Steadman's sketches) to hallucinatory life. *The Kentucky Derby* marked the beginning of Thompson and Steadman's epic partnership, realized in this stage adaptation with an all-star cast and a band performing guitar great Bill Frisell's original score. This raucous performance makes its New York City debut on the eve of the Kentucky Derby. Actor Tim Robbins stars. For tickets visit [ticketmaster.com](#) or call 800-982-2787.

The Town Hall  
123 W 43rd St**SAT MAY 6**

12PM–6PM • \$15 in advance, \$20 day of

**FOOD: TASTE OF ROCKAWAY BEACH**

Tastings from 31 Rockaway beach locations will be on offer, all within walking distance of each other. To purchase tickets online and for more information visit [fareharbor.com](#). This might be a prime time to give the new Rockaway ferry a test ride. It departs from Wall Street multiple times a day starting May 1.

Rockaway Beach

**SUN MAY 7**

6:30AM • \$100

**RIDE: FIVE BORO BIKE TOUR**

For one day, the roads are yours, the bridges are yours, the city is yours. The Five Boro Bike Tour is the largest charitable bike ride in the United States with proceeds funding free bike-education programs. For details and registration visit [bike.nyc/events](#).

The ride starts at intersection of Franklin St & Church St

**TUE MAY 9**

7:30PM • FREE

**BOOK TALK: LISA KO, AUTHOR OF *THE LEAVERS***

Inspired by real-life stories of undocumented women whose U.S.-born children were taken from them and adopted by American families, while the women themselves were jailed or deported, *The Leavers* is Lisa Ko's penetrating debut novel and the winner of the PEN/Bellwether Prize for Fiction. Ko will be joined in conversation by Hillary Jordan, author of the novels *Mudbound* and *When She Woke*.

Greenlight Bookstore | Prospect Lefferts Gardens

632 Flatbush Ave

**WED MAY 10**

7PM–9PM • \$10 suggested donation

**BOOK TALK: A LESBIAN FBI INFORMANT IN THE RED SCARE**

Lisa E. Davis discusses her new book, *Undercover Girl: The Lesbian Informant Who Helped the FBI Bring Down the Communist Party*. Angela Calomiris (1916–95), a Village-based photographer was an FBI informant who became a Red Scare celebrity in 1949 when she testified in a conspiracy trial against the leadership of the Communist Party. A selection of vintage photos accompanies this presentation.

LGBT Center  
208 W 13th St Rm 210**FRI MAY 12 TO SAT MAY 13**

FREE

**DAY SCHOOL: SOCIALISM THEN AND NOW**

The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) will host a socialist day school that will investigate the influence historical movements have had on our current political moment and the lessons they have to offer people working for social change today.

Speakers include Frances Fox Piven, Maurice Isserman, Dan La Botz and Gay Semel. For further details and tickets visit [FB.com/nycdsa](#).

St. Francis De Sales School for the Deaf

260 Eastern Pkwy

**SAT MAY 13**

10PM–4AM • FREE

**CELEBRATION: X & X DANCE PARTY RELAUNCH**

An LGBT dance party with DJ Kandylion and DJ Nickysallright at Brooklyn's nightlife venue that celebrates and supports movements for social justice.

Starr Bar

214 Starr St

**SUN MAY 14**

2PM • \$15

**PERFORMANCE: THE ORIGINAL BADASS MOTHER'S DAY SHOW**

Reverend Billy and the Mothers of the Stop Shopping Choir pay tribute to the mothers of world, drawing inspiration from Julia Ward Howe's Mother's Day Proclamation: "From the bosom of the devastated earth a voice goes up with our own. It says, 'Disarm, Disarm! The sword of murder is not the balance of justice.'"

Joe's Pub at the Public Theater  
425 Lafayette St**THU MAY 18**

6PM • FREE

**DRINKS: ACTIVISTA HAPPY HOUR**

A popular monthly meetup where political activists and organizers get to know each other over drinks.

Cherry Tree Bar  
65 4th Ave**SAT MAY 20 & SUN MAY 21**

11AM–6PM • \$19–\$30

**EATS: VEGETARIAN FOOD FESTIVAL**

Vegan and vegetarian food for sale and sample. Learn from expert plant-based doctors, authors, leaders, chefs and fitness pros. Festival also features a special spot for kids' activities.

Metropolitan Pavilion  
125 W 18th St**SAT MAY 20**

6PM • \$6–15 sliding scale

**BOOK TALK: CHALLENGING MILITARISM, CLIMATE CHANGE & "HUMAN NATURE"**

In *Revolutionary Mothering*, an anthology edited by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens, Mai'a Williams and Loretta J. Ross, women of color propose a very different perspective on "human nature" and the interface between individuals and institutions. Part of the Marxist

Education Project's Ecology Series.

The Brooklyn Commons  
388 Atlantic Ave**TUE MAY 23 THRU SUN JUNE 18**

8PM • FREE

**PERFORMANCE: SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK: JULIUS CAESAR**

The Public Theater's Artistic Director Oskar Eustis directs Shakespeare's play of politics and power. Rome's leader, Julius Caesar, is a force unlike any the city has seen. Magnetic, populist, irreverent, he seems bent on absolute power. A small band of patriots, devoted to the country's democratic traditions, must decide how to oppose him. Shakespeare's political masterpiece has never felt more contemporary. Visit [publictheater.org](#) for ticketing information.

The Delacorte Theater in Central Park

**SUN MAY 28**

12PM–5PM • FREE

**CULTURE: LOISAILDA FESTIVAL**

Since 1987 the Loisaida Festival has celebrated Manhattan's Lower East Side neighborhood. It features diverse manifestations of the neighborhood's Puerto Rican and Latino cultures expressed through music, cuisine and arts. This year's theme is immigration.

Avenue C on the Lower East Side



COOL JUSTICE REPORT BLOG

**DECADENT AND DEPRAVED:**

Legendary artist Ralph Steadman brings outlaw journalist Hunter S. Thompson's original Gonzo masterpiece from the 1970 Kentucky Derby to life in the New York premiere of this staged production.

**IMMIGRANT**

**JOURNEY:** Iyaba Ibo Mandingo performs in unFRAMED, a powerful solo show about one man's struggle with racism and finding his voice for change.

# TOM CAT WORKERS HOWL

MEET THE BAKERS ON THE FRONT LINES OF TRUMP'S ANTI-IMMIGRANT POLICIES



PETER RUGG

By ASTHA RAJVANSHI

**W**orkers at Tom Cat Bakery start kneading the day's first loaves inside a Queens factory at 6 a.m. Soon after, the industrial-scale bakery begins delivering 400 varieties of baked goods to hotels, supermarkets, food chains and Starbucks locations across New York City.

One of the bakers, Sabino Milian, a 40-year-old Guatemalan native, came to New York 17 years ago looking for work. Hurricane Mitch struck Milian's hometown in 1998, leaving his parents helpless and vulnerable. He needed to support them financially. New York presented a land of opportunities, Milian told *The Indypendent* through a Spanish interpreter. He began working for Tom Cat in 2006 and never had any problems with his bosses.

In March, however, a manager called Milian into his office and told him the company was subject to an ongoing audit by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Milian, along with 30 other workers, were given 10 days to prove they possessed proper documentation to legally work in the country. If they failed to do so, they would be fired.

What stung most of all, Milian said, was Tom Cat's unwillingness support its workers. Each employee was offered one week's severance pay for every year they worked at the company. When Milian and others refused the ini-

tial offer, the company became less willing negotiate.

"There was no support or open dialogue," said Milian. At no point had he foreseen or anticipated the firing. "We all worked so hard and did nothing wrong."

Tom Cat's fired employees joined up with Brandworkers, a nonprofit advocacy group for food-manufacturing workers. Negotiating on their behalf, Brandworkers won an extension on the deadline Tom Cat originally set to provide work papers. Now, they are pressuring the company to increase its severance offer. A support fund for the workers has raised over \$28,000 in donations so far.

"Some workers have been working there for over two decades and they only had 10 days to show their official documentation," said Brandworkers' Cynthia Chavez. "Tom Cat did not give their workers respect, after the workers have given their lives to the company. There is a lot of fear in our communities that there's a lot of deportation everywhere," she said. "These workers are the first group of workers who are immigrants and have decided to fight back against the [Trump] administration."

On April 21, their final day of work, the Tom Cat employees and their supporters held a "A Day Without Bread" rally outside the bakery. Four of the fired employees were arrested for chaining themselves to the company's delivery trucks.

Though initially operated out of a garage by its founder, baker Noel Labat-Comess, Tom Cat has grown well beyond its humble beginnings 30 years ago. It employs over

100 people, many of them Hispanic immigrants, and was acquired last year by Yamazaki, the largest baked-goods company in Japan.

A spokesperson for Tom Cat told *The New York Times* that the company first learned about the audit in December and later offered to assist the 31 workers it fired with immigration counsel. Some workers believe management is being throttled by ICE and DHS while others question if the company intended to give those workers such short notice all along.

The Tom Cat workers have vowed to continue to pressure the company and, as *The Indy* went to press, planned to join citywide demonstrations for worker and immigrant rights taking place on May 1.

Under Donald Trump's administration, Milian said immigrant worker freedoms are under serious threat. "The new administration is criminalizing Hispanics. It is asking immigrants to think twice before coming here."

Jonathan Rodriguez, who was also fired by Tom Cat, added: "Before Trump, those who did the right thing and worked hard in their jobs could stay. Now, even that's not enough."

## SOME PLACES YOU CAN FIND

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192 EAST BROADWAY

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### LGBT CENTER 208 W. 13TH ST.

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JALOPY CAFÉ  
317 COLUMBIA ST.

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6 WYCKOFF

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# CELEBRATING A VICTORY

BY RENÉE FELTZ

**W**ith matzo crackers in hand, Rabbi Joshua Stanton led people in song at an interfaith seder on April 11, the first day of Passover. The tune was “Go Down Moses,” also known as “Let My People Go,” and the lyrics had been retouched by Paul Stein to focus on immigrant rights.

*See our faces proud and strong.  
Let my people stay!  
All faiths and colors, we belong.  
Let my people stay!  
To detention, we say “No.”  
All detainees, let them go,  
Free to be with their family,  
Let my people stay!*

The gathering was originally scheduled to show support for Ravi Ragbir, head of the New Sanctuary Coalition of NYC, who was scheduled to meet that day with his deportation officer for the second time in as many months. But the check-in was reset for January 2018, when his current stay of removal expires.

“We are very grateful to have the extra time and for Ravi not to have to live with the fear they could take him in on that day,” his lawyer, Alina Das, told *The Indypendent*.

Ragbir’s previous check-in on March 9 drew hundreds of supporters who had vowed to accompany him again. The seder that took place instead was an opportunity to focus on the liberation marked by Passover.

First, dozens gathered outside 26 Federal Plaza to listen to several speakers, including a Mexican immigrant named Myrna, who described being separated from her U.S. citizen daughters until recently.

“It causes pain,” she said through a translator. “It has an impact on the children. It causes trauma.”

She concluded by taking out a hammer and smashing a block of ice — a reference to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, known as ICE — which she had brought with her and incorporated into the informal ceremony.

“The law, like a block of ice, at first seems solid and impenetrable,” noted Rabbi Stanton.



Leaving behind the melting shards, the group walked to New York Law School. It included members of SEIU, congregants from Judson Memorial Church, law students and friends who had traveled from as far away as Boston.

“I feel very strong,” Ragbir told people as they gathered to hear an update from him and sip kosher grape juice. “I am not doing this alone.”

He then shared more good news by calling up to the front of the room his friend, Ramesh Palaniandi, a New Sanctuary member who met with his deportation agent on the same day as Ragbir in March, and was detained. He explained that Palaniandi had been released and reunited with his wife just days before.

“It is hard to fight without support,” Palaniandi noted, acknowledging protests Ragbir helped lead to call for his release.

Perhaps the most touching moment came when Rabbi Stanton urged the room of mixed ages, ethnicities and backgrounds to “pause and imagine what would be enough if we had a righ-

## RAVI RAGBIR SPARED DEPORTATION

teous society that loved and respected immigrants” — the theme of the Passover song, “Dayenu,” which roughly means “it would have been enough.” Then he welcomed their responses.

“Families undivided!” said one.

“Welcome for the refugees!” said another.

“Opened hearts,” said the final person.

“If only we . . . dared to dream,” concluded Rabbi Stanton.

*The New Sanctuary Coalition of NYC offers trainings in accompaniment, sanctuary, asylum and legal rights for immigrants. See more at newsanctuarynyc.org*

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—FROM THE FOREWORD BY CORNEL WEST

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GARY MARTIN

# FREE HIGHER ED FOR A FEW

## CUOMO'S TUITION SCHEME BENEFITS BETTER-OFF FAMILIES

BY LAUREN GURLEY

**O**n April 12, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo arrived at La Guardia Community College in Queens to sign into law his much-touted free college tuition bill. "No child will be denied college because they can't afford it," Cuomo told a crowd of cheering students and local politicians.

If only it were so.

As a watered-down version of Senator Bernie Sanders' free college proposal, Gov. Cuomo's Excelsior Scholarship pits the needs of middle-class and low-income students against each other.

His Excelsior Scholarship will provide free tuition to City University of New York and State University of New York students whose household incomes are under \$100,000 as of fall 2017 (this cap will increase to \$125,000 in 2019). However, several requirements will preclude most CUNY students, who on average are less well-off than their SUNY counterparts, from participating.

Recipients of the Excelsior Scholarship must be full-time students. They must graduate within four years. And they must remain in New York State after completing their degree for as many years as they received the scholarship — or else it becomes debt that must be repaid. According to the *New York Times*, only 3,000 to 5,000 of CUNY's 274,000 students will qualify.

For Tobin Nestoiter, 23, a full-time psychology major at CUNY's Brooklyn College, the Excelsior Scholarship could have a modest impact. Depending on his financial aid package each year, Nestoiter — the first-generation son of Moldovan immigrants — has had to pay up to \$1,500 in tuition expenses per semester, which would be subsidized under the Excelsior Scholarship.

### MANY OTHER EXPENSES

But like most low-income students, the majority of Nestoiter's tuition expenses are usually paid for by Pell and TAP grants, the federal and state financial aid programs. "The [Excelsior] scholarship wouldn't really apply to [my] tuition," says Nestoiter.

Nestoiter would benefit more from assistance with books and other living expenses. He spends around \$700 on textbooks and subway fare each semester, and will work full-time over the summer to save for the school year rather than pursue internships that could advance his career. "If [scholarship] money could be spent buying textbooks or covering some living expenses, it would ease the burden of going to college," he says.

The Excelsior Scholarship does not extend to expenses beyond tuition — unlike the free tuition programs proposed by Sanders. According to the College Board, tuition fees make up well under half of the costs associated with being a college student.

Stephen Brier, a professor of urban education at the CUNY Graduate Center, and co-author of *Austerity Blues: Fighting for the Soul of Public Higher Education*, says that the Excelsior Scholarship serves both to appease Governor Cuomo's middle-class constituents upstate, and to strengthen his record as a "progressive" if he pursues a presidential bid in 2020.

"It's got much less of an impact in New York City, and much larger an impact outside in different parts of the state," said Brier. "CUNY students are older. Many of them have to work full-time jobs while they go to school. They have their own families to deal with. They're poor. We've got thousands of undergraduates going to CUNY who are homeless."

In the recently enacted 2017 New York state budget, funding for CUNY's 11 senior colleges remained essentially flat while CUNY's seven community colleges received a small boost. For Barbara Bowen, president of the Professional Staff Congress, which represents 27,000 CUNY faculty and professional staff, the promise of free tuition cannot be fully realized if public colleges are themselves deprived of much-needed resources.

"Without adequate state funding, CUNY cannot support the smaller classes, expanded faculty mentorship, improved advisement and increased support services that are proven to improve graduation rates," Bowen said.

But the Excelsior Scholarship marks a substantial victory for middle- and upper-middle-class students, says Kevin Stump, the northeast director of Young Invincibles, a millennial advocacy group — despite its negative impact on the 20 percent of SUNY graduates who typi-

cally leave the state upon receiving their diplomas.

"We're finally providing relief to New York's middle-class families who maybe haven't been helped with financial aid as much as lower-income students," said Stump. "But this actually does nothing for New York's most at-need students and families."

CUNY and SUNY students who do not qualify for the Excelsior Scholarship face annual tuition increases of \$200 per year over the next five years, which means they will be subsidizing their better-off peers' free tuition. The Excelsior Scholarship could also hurt lower-income students by making the admissions process more competitive as upper-middle and middle-class families turn away from private schools, and flood the public university system, according to Brier, the CUNY professor of urban education.

### CUNY'S MISSION

Founded in 1847 as the Free Academy with a stated mission to educate "the children of the whole people," CUNY provided free college education to generations of immigrants striving to rise out of poverty. That ended in 1976, when CUNY began charging tuition amid the financial crisis that struck New York City in the mid-1970s.

"The loss of free tuition really had an impact on poor students," Brier told *The Indypendent*. "When it was eliminated, CUNY's numbers dropped. We didn't come back to 250,000 [students] until very, very late in the 1990s."

Despite its myriad flaws, the Excelsior Scholarship does mark something of a milestone in the drive to restore an earlier consensus that public higher education should be free after decades of increasing austerity.

"We made a commitment as a nation in the post-World War II period that public education would be free and available to everyone who was interested in pursuing it. And we created institutions like city colleges, junior colleges and state colleges," Brier said. "It was a different world. And that is the world, I would argue, that we should go back to."

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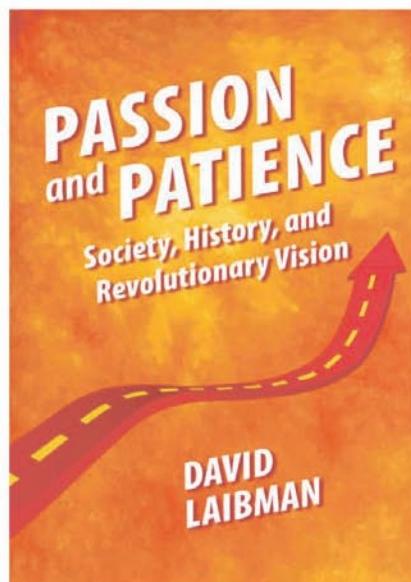
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**PLEASE JOIN US at the PEOPLE'S CLIMATE MARCH in Washington Saturday, April 29<sup>th</sup>**

**TRUMP will make matters much worse!**

Trump's war and climate agenda is a major threat to the future of our planet, the safety of our communities and the health of our people. Here's why—

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- More wars means more refugees—a cycle that endangers world stability and peace.
- Trump will slash funds for the EPA and eliminate climate regulations, giving free reign to oil and gas companies to increase profits while polluting our water and air.
- Trump incites hatred and fear against Muslims, Jews, refugees, immigrants, LGBT and people of color..and his program will deny a woman's right to make decisions on health care.

**Peace and Justice groups will be marching as a contingent part of the climate coalition sponsoring this march on Trump's 100th day in office.**

**March with the peace & justice contingent to demand—  
STOP THE WARS! — SAVE THE PLANET!**

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# NEWS IN BRIEF

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

## 100 DAYS & CONFUSED

Drama, drama, drama. The apple-bottomed playboy with the bushy blond hair entered the Oval Office promising to build a big beautiful wall and so much more. But he arrived at the 100-day mark of his presidency on April 29 with few achievements to his name.

Some impotent missiles were fired at Syria. Trump's "armada" went the wrong way, accidentally averting a nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula. And despite controlling the executive and legislative branches of government, Republicans couldn't agree on how to stop the infamous Obamacare death panels, let alone lay a brick on the Mexican border.

Just about the only thing the new administration did manage to accomplish: ram a humble, pro-life mountain boy onto the Supreme Court. Once on the bench, Neil Gorsuch promptly cast a deciding vote that allowed Arkansas to execute eight people in 11 days.

But, 100 days? "It's an artificial barrier," according to Trump. "Not very meaningful." Not a single legislative proposal in Trump's "Contract with the American Voter" — a "100-day action plan to Make America Great Again" — has been enacted and nine of the 10 proposals have not even been introduced to Congress.

"We feel very proud of what we've been able to accomplish and fulfill the promises that he made to the American people," said Sean Spicer, White House Press Secretary.

## NEW YORK STATE: WATER PROTECTORS WIN ONE

Regulators with New York's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) denied a water permit to the Northern Access Project on April 7. Environmental attorney Kimberly Ong noted that the 24-inch pipeline, slated to carry fracked-gas from Pennsylvania to Canada, would have passed through "192 streams, 600 acres of forests and over 17 acres of wetlands in the state," as well as the Cattaraugus Creek Basin Aquifer — "the sole source of drinking water for 20,000 residents in Cattaraugus, Erie and Wyoming counties in New York."

## NYPD INFILTRATED BLACK LIVES MATTER

Newly disclosed documents reveal the NYPD infiltrated the Black Lives Mat-

ter movement, gaining access to intimate communications between core protest organizers. The documents were obtained in April through a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit brought by the law firm Stecklow & Thompson on behalf of Black Lives Matter activist James Logue. NYPD emails describe officers posing as activists, monitoring the whereabouts of individual protesters and intercepting private text messages shared between organizers of demonstrations that took place at Grand Central Terminal in 2014 and 2015.

## SPECTRUM-TIME WARNER 'RIPPING OFF' CUSTOMERS, WORKERS

Time Warner Cable — which recently changed its name to Spectrum following a merger with Charter Communications last year — orchestrated "a deliberate scheme to defraud and mislead New Yorkers," according to a complaint filed with the New York Supreme Court by state attorney general Eric Schneiderman. "The allegations in [this] lawsuit confirm what millions of New Yorkers have long suspected — Spectrum-Time Warner Cable has been ripping you off," Schneiderman declared.

Visit [ag.ny.gov/speedtest](http://ag.ny.gov/speedtest) to check if your internet is as fast as your provider claims and report your findings to the attorney general.

Meanwhile, 1,800 of the company's field technicians, members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 3, remain on strike after walking out in March. Charter wants to increase employee health care contributions by \$3,000 per year and to stop its contributions to workers pensions.

## B&H TO SHUT DOWN UNIONIZED WAREHOUSES

Amid ongoing contract negotiations with warehouse workers, the electronics mega-store and national online retailer B&H Photo-Video announced it is moving its storage facilities from Brooklyn to New Jersey. United Steelworkers, which represents B&H's 335 employees, filed a complaint against the company with the National Labor Relations Board in January for failing to notify the union of the move. Multiple Department of Labor investigations have highlighted a pattern of routine discrimination at B&H. Last year, the department accused B&H of refusing to hire Black and Asian workers and of forcing Hispanic employees to use separate bathrooms.

# WHERE DID THE PEACE MOVEMENT GO?

## CONFRONTING U.S. MILITARY MADNESS

BY ETHAN YOUNG

We now live under a regime that sees catastrophic war moves as a handy distraction from its endless failures. The boundaries between the executive branch, corporations, finance and the military are fast losing substance. We stand by in horror as they play chicken with the world, from Syria to Russia to North Korea. A mass peace movement is urgently needed but still a long way away. Why?

There are a number of “common sense” reasons that have been floating around the left for decades. There is a long-held belief that ending the draft removed the life-or-death motivation that revived anti-interventionism beyond all expectations during the Vietnam war. Continued sympathy for the Democratic Party is also blamed for the lack of protest over the war moves of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama.

However, what is extraordinary about the U.S. peace movement is not that it receded, but that it emerged at all during the 1960s, affecting the national culture and posing lasting problems for both dominant parties. This mini-enlightenment marked a shift in national consensus from ardently pro-military to anti-intervention, with elements of pacifism and persistent anti-fascism that were defining features of the emerging counterculture. The shift was as much moral as political. This was both a strength (opening hearts and minds) and a weakness (reliance on mass action without organizing to directly pressure electeds on the issue).

The reasons for the decline of the movement are both complicated and concrete. Running for reelection in 1972, President Richard Nixon discovered that it was possible to avoid political consequences for ignoring mass protests. While a divided peace movement was able to nominate antiwar candidate George McGovern, the result was a record-breaking defeat for the Democrats. McGovern’s 22-point rout was seen as proof that elections offered no arena for the peace movement. It didn’t help that it drove the Democrats to swear off appearing “soft on national security.”

After the Indochina war, protest did not end — but it was not the peace movement that brought down Nixon, or for that matter George H.W. Bush, whose 1991 assault on Iraq was momentarily very popular. The movement couldn’t end the proxy wars in Central America or effectively respond to the conquest of tiny Grenada. It lacked the political organization to check Washington’s war machine.

Public protest, including mass civil disobedience, is essential but not enough. It can’t turn “Vietnam syndrome” (anti-intervention sentiment and suspicion of the Beltway/Pentagon elite) into a direct threat to elected officials’ power. The energy to challenge the

tendency of imperialists to foster war has dwindled with the failure of successive attempts to head off U.S. invasions with street action and non-electoral pressure alone.

### CRISIS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Another reason for the movement’s decline involves the move of the center of international crisis to the Mideast. Issues of war and peace having to do with Israel, the Arab world and the Gulf region have always polarized the peace movement. The inherent tensions have debilitated the movement for decades. They offer no simple choice of sides to oppose or support, just an increasingly complicated and dangerous series of quagmires.

The tensions have pulled hard among Jewish Americans, and among liberals as a sociopolitical sector. Jewish activists have always been at the heart of the peace movement, and its sympathy base has been disproportionately Jewish.

By and large, progressive-minded Jews are critical of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s policies, and are wary of the uses of Islamophobia in social control. But the stigma for Jewish Americans of being perceived as breaking trust with Israel can’t be overlooked. Support for Israel as posed by the pro-Netanyahu right has been hegemonic in Jewish institutions, due to several factors. Beyond religion and culture, Jewish society is framed by the memory of fascist extermination and discrimination, and fear of movements that target (or are perceived as targeting) Jews as a people.

The concern that opposing Israel’s role somehow gives aid and comfort to anti-Semites has directly undercut even the most confirmed doves. Militarists have cynically promoted Islamophobia to justify the ‘world cop’ stance from Pakistan to Western Sahara. The presumption of a permanent war between Islam and Israel is widespread, even though Israel and corrupt fundamentalist monarchies such as Saudi Arabia have found common cause against the Arab secular left and other foes. Thus Islamophobia influences liberals who identify with Israel, while it is most openly promoted by neoconservatives, fundamentalist “Christian Zionists” and America Firsters.

Here the racist logic of Islamophobia has taken root in a group that would reject it in other situations. The antiwar stance of liberals is compromised by Islamophobia when they view Islam as the biggest threat to peace. As the failure to move more decisively in electoral politics led to the decline of the peace movement, Islamophobia has led to its stagnation.

So where to? Rebuilding the peace movement requires a change in focus and working out a strategy based on appealing to existing mass antiwar sentiments, and posing peace as a political problem in the



fight against the Trump regime.

A recurring problem has been viewing U.S. military policy from a Cold War perspective. The postwar balance of forces was transformed by the collapse of the Soviet camp and the economic rise of China. The unipolar dominance of the United States is in decline, and with few left anti-imperialist forces to look to, moral outrage at U.S. interventions has devolved into ‘anti-patriotism.’ Viewing every world development as a reflection of U.S. imperial ambitions makes little sense to a public plagued with financial insecurity and xenophobia. Clinton and Obama were partly successful in using “humanitarian intervention” to justify war moves. Bush I, Bush II and now Trump, preferred the “Hulk smash” approach — because they can.

### MILITARISM IS THE PROBLEM

So the anti-intervention focus has proven ineffectual. The problem is less military intervention as a choice, than militarism itself. Non-intervention harks back to George Washington’s opposition to foreign entanglements, and recurred in pre-World War II isolationism and the paleoconservatism first teased, then dropped by Trump. Anti-militarism characterized opposition to World War I, the nuclear disarmament movement and the anti-draft movement. It speaks from the moral objection to war, and political opposition to the military-industrial complex.

Peace Action, the biggest peace group, has tried to popularize transferring funds from war to human services. War Resisters League has helped counsel high schoolers on why they shouldn’t enlist. Anti-militarism is not an easy sell even if working class people are open to it. It has to be hammered home with electeds and promoted through electoral campaigns for explicitly pro-peace candidates.

The peace movement is where realism about U.S. military madness lives. The movement is the main challenger to nationalism and xenophobia, and the main force for internationalism in an interconnected world. It abides in the best political instincts in every other progressive social movement. Restoring it is a collective responsibility for the entire range of forces shocked into motion by the 2016 election.

GINO BARZZIZZA

# THE NEXT AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

**IN HIS CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED NEW NOVEL, OMAR EL AKKAD IMAGINES BATTLELINES DRAWN OVER FOSSIL FUELS**

INTERVIEW BY PETER RUGH

**I**'m not a very photogenic person," Omar El Akkad warned me after we'd finished breakfast. I suspected as much looking at the photograph of the journalist-turned-author on the jacket of his moving and uncannily relevant first novel, *American War*.

Rightly or wrongly, we tend to want authors to give us something more of themselves, ungraspable in words, in their photographs — eyes and teeth that suggest expansive existential realms. But El Akkad perpetually bears the gaze of a person at once wincing down the barrel and peering through distant mist at some tumultuous nexus point of human struggle, violence and anguish — the likes of which we can only interpret through his fiction. That is to say, photographing him requires talents beyond my skillset. (Hence the illustration accompanying this article.)

*American War* is both a story of possible futures and of the present. "El Akkad has fashioned a surprisingly powerful novel — one that creates as haunting a post-apocalyptic universe as Cormac McCarthy did in *The Road*, and as devastating a look at the fallout that national events have on an American family as Philip Roth did in *The Plot Against America*," wrote Michiko Kakutani in her review for the *New York Times*.

Yet, there is nothing that occurs in El Akkad's novel that is not happening on the globe right now — indiscriminate drone strikes, mass exodus of climate refugees, perpetual civil war. We do not need to look 60 years ahead of ourselves to the era in which *American War* takes place to witness El Akkad's vision.

Egyptian-born, Qatar-raised, a Canadian-citizen living in the United States — El Akkad's is a background that spells outsider, compounded by his years working as a globe-trotting reporter for the *Toronto Globe and Mail*. He takes the scenes he saw and the people he met covering the U.S. war in Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay, poverty in Las Vegas and global climate change — phenomena Americans either tend to overlook or think of as far away and abstract — and places them in a future context centered on North America.

American readers will likely finish the novel with a Lacanian sense of the real as Slavoj Žižek has described it: the inescapable reality beneath our country's exceptionalist subterfuge. A broader reading sees *American War* as an international story of how anyone of us, subjected to enough injustice, can be transformed into one of the terrorists we see on the news. Unlike George Orwell's *1984* — in which the concerted power of a totalitarian state triumphs over love, the strongest and most revered of human emotions — arbitrary violence manifested through war eviscerates innocence in *American War*, a drama we see play out within the novel's heroine, Sarat Chestnut.

"Almost, everything in the book exists as a form of analogy," Omar told me, in between bites of home fries at the exceedingly pretentious Midtown French restaurant where we met at his publicist's suggestion.

We could not have had such a leisurely conversation in *American War*'s setting. Vast-expanses and whole populations of the United States have succumbed to poisonous chemical weapon attacks. Larger regions still are submerged underwater due to

climate change-induced sea level rise. You would be comfortable most days in a t-shirt in Alaska, where refugees arrive continuously seeking shelter from violent weather and the civil war underway between the North and South. America's first civil war was fought over slavery and in this novel it is fought over just as intractable and destructive an economic staple: fossil fuel. El Akkad, might not be photogenic, but he has written a book that captures the multiple crises humans today face with crystal clarity.

**PETER RUGH: Why did you write this story?**

OMAR EL AKKAD: All fiction, to a certain extent, has to do with an obsession of sorts, with problems that have no straightforward resolution. I'd spent years thinking about suffering, revenge and the ways these things can fundamentally transform a human being, so I started writing. A few months into that process, I began to see a world take shape, so I inhabited it.

**How did it come about in your mind?**

It started with the idea that there is no foreign kind of suffering. The assumption that the way someone in Iraq or Afghanistan or anywhere in the world reacts to being on the receiving end of warfare is fundamentally different from how you or I would react in this part of the world is plainly false. When I started writing *American War*, I was interested in recasting all the conflicts that have defined the world in my lifetime as elements of something very close to home. The idea was to explore the notion that, if all these faraway things happened not so far away, the results might not be so different.

*It seemed that you were thinking about this idea of family in American War, where we draw the line of who's on our side and who's not.*

When you first meet Sarat at the beginning of the book, her circle of trust is the entire world because all she knows of the world is that house by the Mississippi Sea, her family and a neighbor or two. She trusts the entirety of the world as family. As you progress through the book that circle closes and closes, until the only thing she really trusts is her sense of revenge. Nothing else. It doesn't close because of her own volition, it closes because of the things that are done to her that force her inward, that force her to trust fewer and fewer people.

*People often say, "power corrupts." But we don't often talk about happens when we lack power.*

It's about agency to me, it's a sense about a basic human need to have some say over the things we do and the things that are done to us. Sarat slowly loses agency and has to find it by some other means. Inevitably, that turns into violence, the most immediate form of agency, the most direct way to find out that you've done something.

*We could not have had such a leisurely conversation in American War's setting. Vast-expanses and whole populations of the United States have succumbed to poisonous chemical weapon attacks. Larger regions still are submerged underwater due to*



**'FOR A VERY LONG TIME, MINORITIES WERE TREATED AS FUEL'**

*all of these people that were critical of Trump suddenly get behind the bombing. Fareed Zakaria of CNN said it was "the day Trump became President." Your book points out how we go into war with one attitude but then the consequences catch up.*

Violence never really lies. There's a straightforward aspect to it. I'm constantly amazed by just how many otherwise reasonable, thoughtful people, immediately fall in line when the specter of violence shows up and set aside all of their intellectual and moral issues. Those missiles caused zero change in the wider Syrian conflict. Yet all these people are suddenly standing in line cheering.

*Was Donald Trump on your mind when you wrote the novel?*

No, I started the novel in the summer of 2014 and I finished it a couple of weeks before Donald Trump announced he was running. If you had told me back then that we would be sitting here today talking about President Donald Trump...

*If he was a fictional character he'd be unbelievable.*

You could never get away with it, not with a single part of this administration. You would get kicked out of any publisher's office. Even on the minor stuff. I mean that building that his son-in-law apparently got financed by the Chinese, the address is 666 Fifth Avenue. You could never get away with that in a work of fiction!

*What do you make of the supposed Red State/Blue State divide in America today? In American War, the North and the South are literally two different countries.*

The novel is a rejection of the Us-versus-Them binary that we've had to live with for the past 17 years. When you look at a granular level, conflicts are much more complex.

*Race is in the background in American War. That would seem odd in a novel set in the present-day South.*

Lots of people have said, "I find it unbelievable that race wouldn't be a bigger factor in this kind of situation." They are absolutely right.

Race is there by analogy. It's there in the way that fuel is represented in the book. I knew that if I were to tackle race as a direct topic I would need to devote the entire book to it. Race in America is not something that you tackle with glancing blows. Race is part of two founding moments that America really needs to come to terms with; one being a genocidal population displacement, the other thing being the enslavement of an entire people based on the color of their skin.

The way I treated race in this story was through the idea of fuel, which came from the idea that in this country, for a very long time, that's what minorities were treated as — they were treated as fuel. There are some who say, "They were treated as property." No, people like their property, people treat their property pretty well. They were used as fuel for a giant commercial machine that created more wealth than any commercial machine in human history.

Now, I'm working on another story, which is plainly concerned with the way the color of your skin or the accent with which you speak or your ethnicity defines you. That's the entirety of the book.

*I really appreciated the analogy between fossil fuels and slavery in American War.*

I knew I wouldn't find anything that met the level of basic human cruelty that the first Civil War was caused by. But many decades from now, when we've moved on to more efficient sources of fuel, it's going to be very easy for somebody to stand up and say, "I can't believe they didn't understand how bad it was. If it was me back then, I would have stood up and said something."

In fact, that's probably not the case. We're not just talking about a moral failing of a small group. We're talking about the fuel that powers one of the biggest commercial empires in the world. And if you aren't affected directly by it — it is very easy for you to just turn your head and benefit from the fruits of this thing. That seemed like a workable analogy.

*Do you think it's going to take a social upheaval — maybe not a civil war, but some sort of massive change of trajectory — to get us off of fossil fuels?*

We have very few places in our history as a species of dealing with problems whose worst effects are going to show up many, many years from now. Progress takes a really long time but you can move backwards in a second.

When you look at the amount of progress that we've had in the last two decades on environmental issues, it was really slow and grueling, but we finally got to the place of the Paris Accords. You finally get to that place and then, in a split second, the administration changes. Suddenly you have a head of the EPA who hates the EPA. I worry about that very asymmetrical rate of change.

*I've read that you don't consider American War realistic in terms of its timeline. But we do have this mounting problem of climate change.*

The world of the novel is based on 60 meters of sea level rise. Of course, nobody knows what will happen between now and then, but for now it's not realistic.

I did a lot of reporting on climate change and there were two things that scared me. The first was the extent to which people can't think beyond their 30-year mortgage. And in terms of space, they think within the boundaries of their own property.

The other thing that scares me is that we have no idea how much worse climate change could be than what our current models project. Louisiana loses a football field worth of land every hour. That's probably the biggest climate disaster in the United States today, and we're not doing a damn thing about it.

*Do you feel like the novel helps to clarify that for people?*

I think that you're in a very dangerous place anytime you need fiction to make things real for you, anytime novelists are being asked to provide answers.

*You don't believe that fiction can change people's minds?*

The most dangerous people on earth right now — or maybe it's always been this way — are people who can't differentiate between truth and what they'd like the truth to be. Someone who is readily willing to change their mind can be counted on to accept the better argument. That's not a person you have to worry about. That's a person we should all hope to be. But someone who thinks that changing their mind is a form of weakness is probably going to be unchanged by this book or by anything.

*The far fringe of the Republican Party is famous for playing fast and loose with the truth.*

You have an entire party that is more concerned with being on the right side of power than the right side of the issues. That's a very dangerous thing to have in a ruling party. Certainly, the part of the world where I grew up provides plenty of evidence of what that looks like.

*Why is dystopia so prevalent in the popular culture these days?*

I think it has to do with anxiety. When things are going well — when peace prevails and the economy is humming and the political landscape is stable — there's a natural complacency that sets in, a tendency to assume nothing will change. But in the opposite climate, change is all anyone can think about. That makes times of great negative upheaval a fertile ground for dystopians, because dystopians are concerned chiefly with the grotesque extrapolation of all that is wrong with the present.

*Can we turn back from dystopia, or is it our inevitable fate?*

There's more good people in this world than bad, more kindness than cruelty. I don't think the chief purpose of dystopian books is to describe the inevitable. The beating heart of any book isn't concerned with prophecy, it's concerned with empathy.

# FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE AGE OF TRUMP

BY BRIAN TOKAR

**J**ust over a year ago, diplomats from around the world were celebrating the final ratification of the December 2016 Paris Agreement, proclaimed to be the first globally inclusive step toward a meaningful climate solution. The agreement was praised as one of President Obama's signature accomplishments and as a triumph of his "soft power" approach to world affairs. But even then, long before Donald Trump and his coterie of plutocrats and neofascists rose to power pledging to withdraw from the agreement, there were far more questions than answers.

First, recall that the Paris Agreement was based entirely on countries voluntarily submitting plans outlining their proposed "contributions" to a climate solution. This was the outcome of Obama and Hillary Clinton's interventions at the ill-fated 2009 Copenhagen climate summit, where the U.S. delegation made it clear that it would never agree to mandatory, legally binding limits on global warming pollution. While most global South representatives at successive U.N. summits sought to preserve that central aspect of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, rich countries united during the years between Copenhagen and Paris behind the notion that climate measures should be strictly voluntary.

Secondly, the Paris Agreement contained no means of enforcement whatsoever. While the text was abundant with words like "clarity," "transparency," "integrity," "consistency," and "ambition," there's literally nothing to assure that such aspirations can be realized. The only official body focused on implementation and compliance is mandated to be "transparent, non-adversarial and non-punitive." Countries are urged to renew their proposals every few years, with a stated hope that the various "Nationally-Determined Contributions" to climate mitigation will become stronger over time. But if a President Trump or a potential President Le Pen chooses to do the opposite, there's nothing but vague diplomatic peer pressure standing in the way.

Third, the various plans submitted prior to Paris fell far short of what is needed to prevent catastrophic destabilization of the earth's climate systems. Numerous assessments of the plans that countries brought to Paris suggested an outcome approaching 3.5 degrees Celsius (6.3°F) of warming above pre-industrial levels by 2100, far short of the stated goal of a maximum of 2 degrees, much less the aspirational goal of only 1.5 degrees that was demanded by delegates from Africa and small island nations. We know, however, that at the current level of just over 1 degree Celsius (1.8°F) in average temperature rise, we are experiencing uniquely unstable weather, Arctic ice is disappearing and catastrophic storms, wildfires, droughts and floods are disproportionately impacting the world's most vulnerable people. Two degrees is very far from a "safe" level of average warming; it is far more likely to be the 50-50 point at which the climate may or may not rapidly shift into a thoroughly chaotic and unpredictable state.

The global climate movement responded to the Paris

outcome with an impressive showing of skepticism and foresight. Thousands of people filled the streets of Paris itself, declaring that the U.N. conference had fallen far short of what is needed, and parallel demonstrations voiced similar messages around the world. Last spring, a series of worldwide "Break Free from Fossil Fuels" events temporarily shut down major sites of fossil fuel extraction and transport on every continent, including major actions against oil transport by rail in the northeastern and northwestern United States, a massive convergence to shut down Germany's most polluting coal mine and a boat blockade of Australia's biggest coal port. Last fall and winter, the encampment at Standing Rock in North Dakota brought together the most inspiring alliance of indigenous communities and allies we have seen yet and encampments inspired by Standing Rock have since emerged at the sites of a handful of major pipeline projects across the United States. Midwestern activists are responding with renewed determination to challenge the Trump administration's move to resurrect the dreaded Keystone XL pipeline, which would transport toxic, high-carbon tar sands oil from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico.

It remains to be seen how much the current administration's excesses will curtail longer-range climate progress. Obama's Clean Power Plan is clearly on the chopping block, but independent estimates have suggested for some time that this represented (at best) only an incremental step beyond business as usual. The more internationalist voices in the Trump administration want the United States to remain a party to the Paris Agreement, hoping that it can be weakened even further to benefit global fossil fuel interests.

Meanwhile, techno-optimists like Bill Gates and Michael Bloomberg argue that the economic benefits of continued renewable energy development are compelling enough to keep their expansion on track for the next several years. In many locations, renewable installations are already far more cost effective than fossil fuel plants, and a new report from the Union of Concerned Scientists reveals that five U.S. states now rely on renewable resources (including big hydroelectric dams) for more than 65 percent of their in-state energy production. Employment in solar and wind energy is fast approaching 10 times the number of coal jobs in the United States, and nearly 2 million people are reportedly employed in energy conservation and efficiency. Low oil prices have driven a rapid decline in the most extreme forms of fossil fuel extraction, though increased automation in conventional oil and gas drilling has greatly enhanced the profitability of many such operations. Meanwhile, numerous state and local climate initiatives are continuing to partly offset the long legacy of climate inaction — and now overt sabotage — at the federal level.

But small measures are no longer enough, as the conse-

quences of an increasingly unstable climate wreak havoc on communities around the world. Scientists now agree the atmosphere has a finite and ever-shrinking "carbon budget." If we exceed this maximum in accumulated carbon emissions since the dawn of the fossil fuel age, it could become physically impossible to restabilize the climate before many thousands of years have passed. Long before then, the atmospheric conditions necessary to sustain complex life on earth, much less a moderately stable human civilization, could be lost forever. We need to dismantle the fossil fuel economy in just a few short years, reducing consumption every year for the foreseeable future. Thus the Trump agenda is not just a temporary setback, but an existential threat to our survival. The *New York Times* opinion page editors were not exaggerating when they headlined a recent series of environmental case studies from around the world, "The Planet Can't Stand This Presidency."

We also know that past administrations, and governments around the world, have thoroughly failed to implement a proactive climate agenda. Obama's "all of the above" energy policy, embracing renewables and energy efficiency while simultaneously expanding fracking and offshore oil drilling, was a disaster for the planet as well. A capitalist system that demands unlimited growth — and

## NOT JUST A TEMPORARY SETBACK, BUT AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO OUR SURVIVAL.

constantly holds our jobs and economic well-being hostage to that overarching goal — would likely respond to decreasing consumption of resources with all the fury of an economic depression, shifting the worst impacts onto the most vulnerable people while bailing out the wealthy and powerful. This only reinforces what climate justice activists have been saying for some time now: that campaigns for climate action can only succeed as part of a holistic and fully intersectional liberation movement. We need to challenge all the institutions that blame our problems on immigrants and poor people while simultaneously threatening planetary survival. We need to challenge all forms of oppression, create genuinely sustainable and regenerative alternatives, and act boldly upon our understanding that the planet can no longer stand this economic system.

Brian Tokar is the author of *Toward Climate Justice: Perspectives on the Climate Crisis and Social Change* (New Compass Press, 2014). Links to his other writings can be found online at [social-ecology.org](http://social-ecology.org).



GABRIELLA SZPUNT

## UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

# SCIENCE ON THE MARCH

INTERVIEWS &amp; PHOTOS BY PETER RUGH

**I**n his budget blueprint, released in March, Donald Trump called for drastic cuts to scientific research. Federal funds for health, environmental and technological research would have been drastically slashed. One example: An Energy Department program that has provided \$1.5 billion in grants for renewable energy development since 2009 would get the ax if the president had his way, along with a \$900 million slice of the department's Office of Science.

Many of the most arbitrary cuts have proven to be deeply unpopular (Republicans get cancer too) and may not survive congressional budget negotiations that will take place later this year. Yet Trump's budget blueprint was a loud declaration of the president's priorities, which clearly privilege militarism over knowledge.

In response, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets around the world for the global March for Science on Earth Day, April 22. The Indy spoke with some of the scientists who participated in New York. Here is a sample of what they had to say.

#### CATHY MARION AND MELISSA FOSTER — Environmental Contamination Experts

We want to send a message to the administration that we don't like what they're doing in terms of budget cuts and cutting funding for science research. It is important to keep science progressing. Science brings us everything from clean drinking water to safe environments to vaccines and healthy animal populations. Science is what keeps us safe and healthy.

We are definitely worried about climate change. It's one of the biggest issues facing the earth as a whole right now.

All we can do is keep making our voices heard, come out en masse, march and contact our representatives to let them know we don't like the direction the Trump administration is taking.

There is a movement for scientists to become more involved politically. We have certain restrictions on political activity, but we have no restrictions on what we do in our personal time. A very high percentage of the people that we work with are becoming politically engaged.

#### ERICA JAMES — Lower East Side Girls Club

The Lower East Side Girls Club has a huge science and STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) program. We're teaching our girls about careers in science and technology, giving them the skills to change the world. We're worried that cuts to science will jeopardize those careers. That's why we're out here marching. We're celebrating science, celebrating

girls and hoping that the funding will stay with us.

My message to Trump is stick with the facts. We're looking out for our community. Climate change is something that affects everybody everywhere, especially here in the Lower East Side.

#### MS. GORDON — Lab Technician

We have to make science intersectional. Trump has placed travel bans on countries where a lot of scientists and doctors are coming from. You can't ignore that kind of discrimination, that kind of racism. I think that you have to pay attention to the sources of funding, and where that funding is going.

If we had more respect for the truth in this current administration, the policy making we would be a lot better off. Trump has no concern, no regard for the truth. He is not interested in it. He needs to make sure he's paying attention to all the movements under way right now, to the fact that there are so many people rising up against him. That means something.

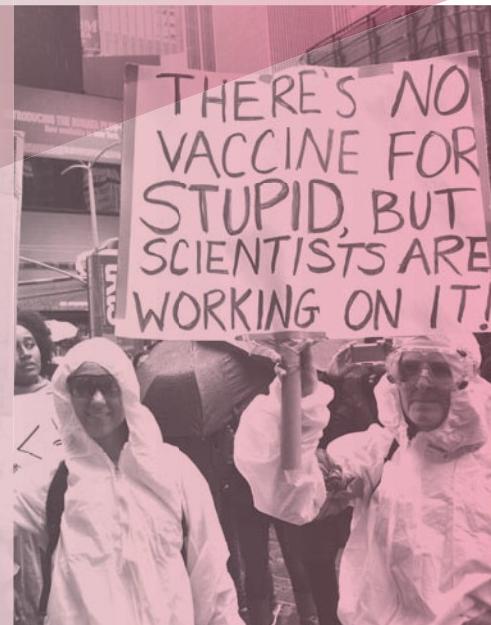
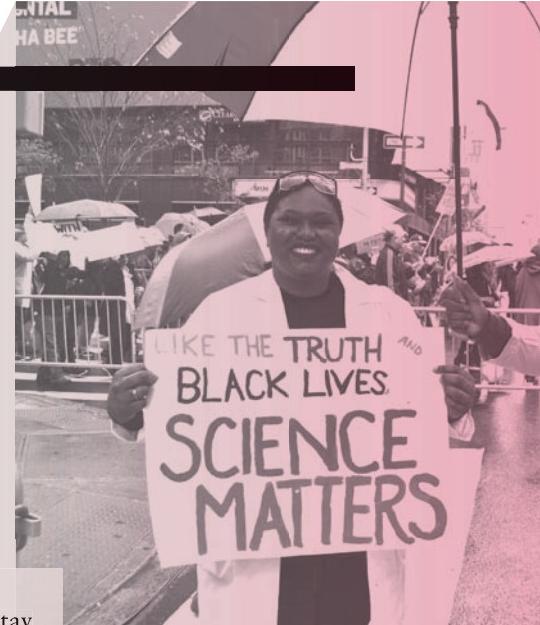
#### JESUS TORRES VAZQUEZ — Associate Professor, Department of Cell Biology, NYU Skirball Institute

I study blood vessel development in zebrafish. My research and the research of many people who are marching now is done to understand how nature works. That knowledge has lots of applications.

It's very important to fund science because science gives us knowledge that allows us to lead better lives. If we don't monitor our environment, we cannot know what is harming it. I encourage the President and his cabinet to listen to scientists and make decisions based on evidence.

As scientists, we have to get more involved in understanding how decisions are made in the government and what is being taught at our schools. Everybody should learn how to think for himself or herself and make decisions based on evidence.

I would like to encourage more scientists to go to schools and talk about what they do and the challenges they face; explain why their research is useful. If more people know how fascinating science is, people would value it more.



ALL PHOTOS PETER RUGH

# AntiSocial Studies

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# THIS COUNTRY IS UP FOR GRABS

## TIME FOR THE LEFT TO EMBRACE A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY

BY YOTAM MAROM

### CHALLENGE

It's the morning of Feb 3, 2017. I'm at my desk at home, in Brooklyn, sunlight creeping through the blinds on the window to my left. I'm hovering between work emails and Facebook, following the rabbit hole of the Bodega Strike, in which thousands of bodega owners and workers from across New York City — most of them Yemeni and Muslim — have gone on strike and gathered at Brooklyn's Borough Hall to protest President Trump's Muslim ban. The images show a sea of brown people waving American flags. I watch the videos, and the deafening chants of "USA! USA!" vibrate through my speakers.

The flags blind me, transport me back to 2004, when I was a senior in high school. The United States had recently paid for a coup to overthrow a democratically elected government in Haiti. Before that, Afghanistan and Iraq, the Patriot Act and extraordinary rendition. And the flags. I remember the flags, laying claim to every crack and crevice of public life — hanging from cranes, billowing from lampposts, draped over doorways, flashing across my television screen. I decided then, in the face of all those flags and the immense loss of life they seemed to accompany, that I didn't want to be a part of this thing they called America. If America was genocide and slavery and empire, then it was never ours to begin with.

I stopped paying attention to electoral politics, stopped thinking of the state as an avenue for change. I stopped thinking about scale as a factor in political organizing, stopped talking politics with people who aren't in the movement, stopped reading the news. I joined a left that every day drifted further and further away from building political power, from attempting to win over the public, from working-class people, and deeper into a bubble of its own. Instead, we built our own organizations, our own publications, our own spaces.

We had big dreams but those dreams remained our little secret, tucked safely out of sight from the rest of the world. The rest of the world was out of our sights too.

Now, as I scroll through the images at Borough Hall, I wonder how these people, of all people, can find ownership, belonging and even love in a place like this. Perhaps this is what they think they have to do survive. Or maybe they really do love this place, despite the contempt its leaders have shown them. Or perhaps they want to love it, and their flag-waving is not a celebration of the vision of the founding fathers but a calling into existence of a dream not yet born. Maybe it is just better here than the place they left behind.

Maybe they can see that this country is up for grabs.

### POSSIBILITY

The system is unstable and that instability will likely increase.

For Trump, a deepening crisis is an opportunity to barrel forward as planned; after all, crisis has always been part of his narrative. He will blame it on his political enemies and communities already under attack and use it to expand his agenda. The rest of the Republican Party, the defense industry and much of the business class will likely go along, until they think the ship is actually sinking. White nationalists and other far-right wingers will use it as an opportunity to keep pulling the whole political map in their direction; they now have Bannon in the White House to help them do it. For establishment Democrats — as well as the Republicans who defect — the crisis will provide the opportunity to name Trump as the problem, while preserving business as usual.

But this crisis is an opportunity for the left too. It's an opportunity to grow, become popular, build visionary organizations and multi-issue movements that go on the offensive. It is an opportunity to take the streets, and to take over real

levers of power. It is our chance to reject both Trump's white economic nationalism and the corporate Democrats' multicultural neoliberalism, to bring to life a new kind of politics that combines racial, gender and economic justice to unite the majority of the population against the elites. It is an opportunity to finally translate our proven ability to shift the national discourse into real power.

This crisis is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the left to lead. The big question is whether we will be willing to do so.

### AMBIVALENCE

All of these possibilities fly through my mind as I think about the bodega strikers. I take a deep breath, open my laptop again and stare my ambivalence straight in the face.

In order to do what this moment calls on us to do, we will have to identify with this place and its mythology. We have to say that this place belongs to us instead of them.

But everything I know here stands on land stolen from people who were murdered for its theft, was built with labor extracted from people brought there in chains, was taken from around the world at gunpoint. It is a huge risk to be popular, to enter into struggle over the whole of this country, knowing that so many populist movements before ours ended up watering down their politics to accommodate the ruling class, selling out their grand visions of tomorrow for partial gains of the day or abandoning those most oppressed at the finish line. It feels dangerous to grow — to welcome into our movements the many people who are becoming politicized in these times — knowing that the greater pains and burdens of entering into the delicate and never-ending experiment of solidarity will fall on those already most impacted by the system. It's frightening to have the kind of hope a struggle like this demands. Where there is hope, there is often heartbreak.

But we can embrace the malleability of America and contest our enemy's hegemony over the story of this place while telling the truth about its brutal history and present. We can care about this country and this land and its peoples, while honoring those who lived here before us. We can see nationhood not as a barrier to internationalism, but a stepping-stone towards it. We can join with the growing majority of people standing in opposition to Trump. We can do it while still going on the offensive against all of his enablers — the Republican Party he represents, the huge corporate interests he has installed in government and the Democratic Party establishment whose marriage to Wall Street helped create the conditions for this in the first place.

We can be popular and speak in a language that the public understands, while bringing a critique of capitalism, white supremacy and patriarchy into the mainstream, while holding up a vision for the world we can have if we fight for it, while saying words like single-payer health care and universal basic income, even reparations and socialism. We can grow our movements dramatically, invest deeply in the transformation of the millions of people looking for a political home in this moment, and build deeply across race, class, gender and sexuality, while still demanding more from each other — while practicing solidarity and accountability with the wisdom to know that we will fail and try again and fail better if we keep trying. We can enter powerfully into electoral politics, build grassroots political power, take over every potential vehicle for change available to us, while still insisting that movements are what really drive social change, that nothing can replace the hard organizing it takes to bring people together to liberate themselves, that meaningful change demands powerful and uncompromising civil disobedience that removes our consent from the institutions that cause harm. We can have hope, while still leaving room for the inevitable heartbreaks we will experience on the way.

Arundhati Roy writes: "To call someone anti-American, indeed, to be anti-American, is not just racist, it's a failure of



SCOTT LYNCH

### FEM-POPULISM:

Millions of Americans marched for women's rights the day after Donald Trump was sworn into office.

### WE BELONG:

Members of New York's Yemeni community rally outside Brooklyn's Borough Hall on Feb. 2 to protest the Trump administration's Muslim travel ban.



CODY WILLIAMS

the imagination.”

In 2004, when this country suffocated us with its flags, they called us anti-American. In our defiance, we agreed. They can have their fucking America, we told ourselves. As I think back now on my past retreat from this country and its dreams, I know that it was built, in part, on righteous anger, principled rejection and a grounded read of history. But I know, too, that beneath those things was also a secret helplessness, an arrogance covering up shame, an unwillingness to step outside the comfort of my leftist bubble, a paralyzing fear of my smallness in the shadow of a towering enemy. Now, years later, I know to call this tendency the politics of powerlessness, and it suddenly hits me that, so often, instead of fighting over this place and its future, we let our enemy have it.

In the end, only a genuinely liberatory popular movement can defeat Trump and the right-wing populist tidal wave he rode in on. Only a truly left populist movement can ensure that this regime not only falls, but also takes the entire Republican Party and the establishment Democrats along with it, while opening up space for the world we all deserve. In order for the left to provide the leadership that is required, we will have to learn to say this country’s name out loud. We will have to open ourselves up to the vast potential stored in this place and its people, to take responsibility for it. Ultimately, we will have to do a better job imagining, and tell a story about America that gives meaning and a sense of belonging to the millions of people who are ready to fight for the bigger, better, bolder dreams that are at the tips of our fingers. We will have to say this place belongs to us as much as anyone else.

#### REIMAGINING

America — both its past and its future — is a story that can be written a thousand different ways, and our opponents know this. That is why fascists and would-be dictators, wealthy oligarchs and Wall Street politicians alike, always claim to speak for the whole — for that great, big America. They wrap themselves in the flag, project a vision for the future of this entire country and call up people’s greatest fears and deepest dreams. The country they describe is not for most of us. But they say they will make it great, great again, and that promise floats up into the air and captures imaginations, encapsulates real pain and longing, speaks into existence that grand possibility for which people are willing to do the most beautiful and heinous things.

To cede the simple truth of this nation’s possibility to our enemy is a massive shirking of responsibility. It relegates us to the margins of political life, which, in turn, dooms the people we love, the planet we live on and the values we cherish. Just because we fail to show up to the battlefield that doesn’t mean the war is not going to take place, only that we’ve surrendered before it has even begun.

America is the Trail of Tears and chattel slavery, the Ludlow Massacre and Jim Crow, Hiroshima and bloody interventions around the world. But it is also slave rebellions and the women’s suffrage movement, the Flint sit-down strike and the occupation at Wounded Knee, the Stonewall Riot and the uprising at Attica. It is Occupy Wall Street and the Movement for Black Lives, the immigrant justice movement and the uprising at Standing Rock, the Bernie wave and the climate movement. America is working-class, indigenous, Muslim and queer. It is undocumented, Black, Sikh and trans. It is the 99 percent, women and immigrants. It is all of us.

Perhaps we are not the America they planned for, but we are, as much as anything else, the America that could be.

*A longer version of this article originally appeared at medium.com.*

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MON MAY 8 • 7-9:30PM  
*American Law and the Risks to Children’s Health*

Linda C. Fentiman reveals how criticism is disproportionately assigned to pregnant women and mothers when something bad happens to their children.

MON MAY 15 • 7-9:30PM  
*Big Hunger*

AUTHOR TALK: Andrew Fisher takes a critical look at the business of hunger

and offers a new vision for the anti-hunger movement with his new book,

*Big Hunger*.

R

MON MAY 22 • 7-9:30PM  
*The Air* Max Elbaum

FEMINIST THEORY  
FROM MARGIN TO CENTER

MON MAY 29 • 7-9:30PM

READING: In her new book, *American Law and the Risks to Children’s Health*, Linda C. Fentiman reveals how criticism is disproportionately assigned to pregnant women and mothers when something bad happens to their children.

MON MAY 15 • 7-9:30PM  
*Big Hunger*

AUTHOR TALK: Andrew Fisher takes a critical look at the business of hunger

and offers a new vision for the anti-

hunger movement with his new book,

*Big Hunger*.

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MON MAY 29 • 7-9:30PM  
*Zapatista Stories*

OPEN MIC: A women’s and transfolks’

poetry jam and open mic hosted by

Vittoria Repetto — the hardest working

guinea butch dyke poet on the Lower

East Side. Come out and deliver your

poetry, prose, songs and spoken word.

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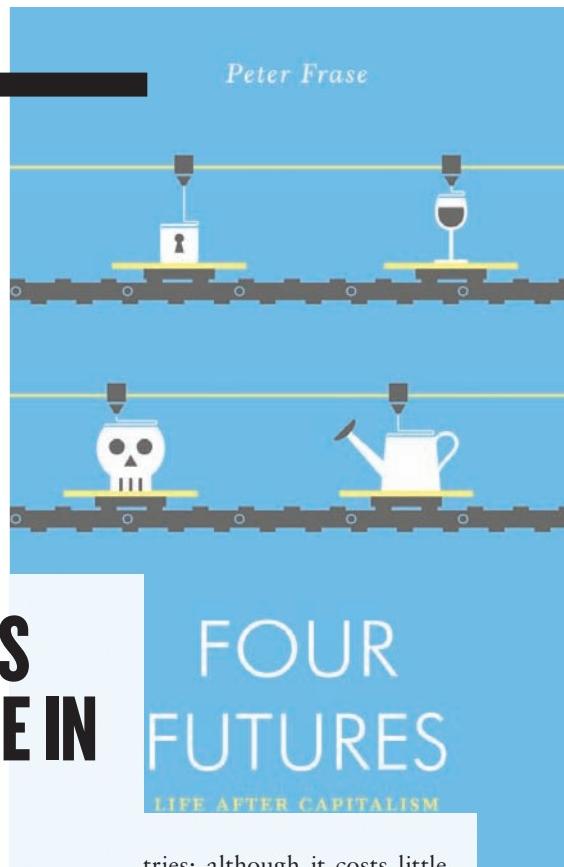
poetry jam and open mic hosted by

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poetry, prose, songs and spoken word.



## FINDING SEEDS OF THE FUTURE IN THE PRESENT

*Four Futures: Life After Capitalism*  
BY PETER FRASE  
VERSO 2016

By Matt Wasserman

**I**t's hard to focus on the far-off future when the present looks like the second term of the old slogan "socialism or barbarism" has come true. But no matter who was elected in November, the underlying structural issues would largely remain the same: the seas are rising, the other animals are dying and the robots are coming for our jobs.

Although a slight book, Peter Frase's *Four Futures* is an ambitious attempt to grapple with what climate change and automation mean for left politics. Its foundational premise is that what the Frankfurt School optimistically calls "late capitalism" is not going to survive forever and we can't return to the social democracy of the 20th century. We can only go forward — or backwards — into the unknown.

The title refers to his attempt to schematize four possible future worlds, plotted on the axes of abundance vs. scarcity and equality vs. inequality:

	ABUNDANCE	SCARCITY
EQUALITY	Communism	Socialism
HIERARCHY	Rentism	Exterminism

To attempt to figure out what each would look like he draws on science fiction as much as social theory. Move over, Marx, Foucault and Spivak; Frase is more interested in discussing "Star Trek," the graphic novel *Transmetropolitan* or the novels of Kim Stanley Robinson.

Crucial to Frase's project is that elements of each potential future are already present, just unequally distributed. His simplified "ideal-types" are meant to depict the possibilities immanent in the present, amplified and played out to their logical conclusion.

We see elements of "rentism," for example, in the legal sparring over the generic production of life-saving anti-retroviral drugs by poor coun-

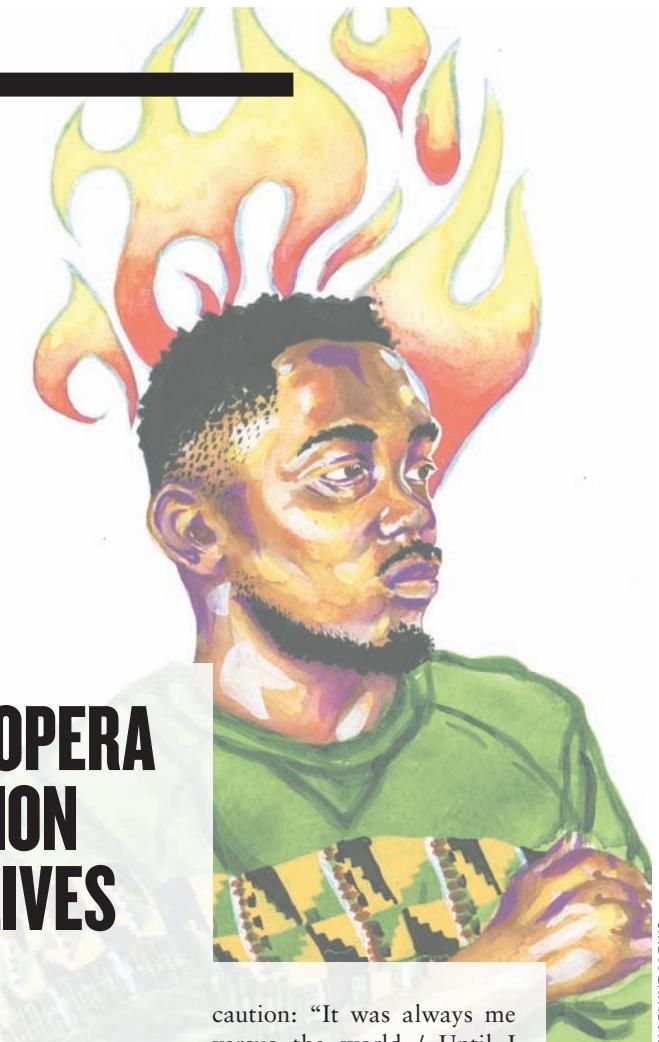
tries; although it costs little or nothing to make each individual unit, profit-maximizing companies jealously guard their "intellectual property." (Economists use the term "rent" to describe the money that accrues to

people just for owning inherently finite resources, such as land or oil, as opposed to the money that is made through labor — yours or someone else's.) The rise in importance of non-material forms of economic production could mean the promise of great abundance for all, in one possible future, but present legal and political systems make it instead the source of great profits, accumulating mostly to the benefit of holders of copyrights and patents. Ask Google — or Aaron Swartz — if information wants to be free.

*Four Futures* is not intended to be an exercise in crystal ball gazing or determinism. Instead, Frase places contingency and politics at the heart of his vision. He is resolute that what the future looks like and how we get there is a question to be decided by our collective action(s). But orienting ourselves against the horizon can be a way of figuring out which direction we want to walk. Speculating about potential futures allows us to see the possibilities of the present and ar-

ticulate goals beyond just reacting to the daily deluge of new outrages under Trump.

Although it occasionally reads a bit like a left-wing book report, *Four Futures* is a surprisingly entertaining counterweight to the dystopian reality of our present. Marx famously fulminated against trying to sketch out visions of future utopias, but Frase convinced me that he needed to lighten up and read some speculative fiction.



## A HIP-HOP OPERA FROM A SCION OF BLACK LIVES MATTER

*DAMN.*  
BY KENDRICK LAMAR  
TOP DAWG/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE, 2017

By Brady O'Callahan

**T**he world's a mess and we're all looking for answers. We're all looking for someone to inspire us, someone to blame. Where does change start? Where did it all go wrong? Most of us look to the political landscape, religion, the media. Kendrick Lamar looks within. He's been a protégé of Dr. Dre, Compton's torch-bearer, and put out rallying cries for the Black Lives Matter movement. Now, with *DAMN.*, he struggles with the responsibility of being the savior, the anointed one, the answer.

The album begins with a man out to lend a helping hand who is killed for his selflessness. If that sounds intense, good. Lamar has a flair for fervor, and it's on full display here. *Where To Pimp a Butterfly* positioned him as a voice among voices, navigating through a jazzy expanse, *DAMN.* places his voice at the forefront over clean, simpler beats that set the tone but don't steal the show. Over the course of its 14 tracks, he's funny, angry, flawed, bold, but always unabashedly himself. The album artwork is stark, focusing on Lamar, head slightly bowed, standing in front of a brick wall in a plain white T-shirt. He seems weathered, exhausted, but defiant and, more importantly, still standing.

Lamar has seen his fair share of battles, too. "FEAR." hurls warning upon warning from the perspective of his mother ("I beat yo' ass, keep talkin' back") as she tries to instill in her son the skills he'll need to survive as a young black man in America ("I'll prolly die anonymous / I'll prolly die with promises.") On "DUCKWORTH.", however, he acknowledges that it's not just these outside forces he must handle with

caution: "It was always me versus the world / Until I found it's me versus me." Maybe to change the world around you, you need to start with yourself.

It is Lamar's mix of introspection with political consciousness that has led many fans to consider him a voice for real people. Throughout *DAMN.*, he relates how some consider him "anointed" and plead for him to guide and pray for them. In the video for "HUMBLE.", he appears emblazoned with a tongue of fire, a Biblical image which signifies the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit, granting the apostles the ability to speak in languages previously unknown in order to spread the good word to all peoples. He embraces this role and intends to reach those who might not want to hear him.

Of course, such responsibility can also be thankless, opening you up to personal attacks, pain and frustration. Lamar has gotten a lot of heat for his portrayal of police brutality in his music, videos and performances, mostly from tone-deaf talking heads like Fox News' Geraldo Rivera (whose condemnation of Lamar's lyrics is sampled directly on "DNA."). We ask a lot of him, but he admits, "Ain't nobody prayin' for me."

*DAMN.* is a monument, a chronicle of the role of the artist and the self in a world standing on the edge of collapse. Kendrick Lamar is at his absolute best here.



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## THE WOMAN WHO SAVED NEW YORK

*Citizen Jane: Battle for the City*  
DIRECTED BY MATT TYRNAUER  
SUNDANCE SELECTS, 2017  
92 MIN, NR

By Mark Read

**S**o, a film producer walks into a theater and asks the audience if they have any questions. The only problem is that the movie hasn't started yet.

This isn't a joke. Robert Hammond, the producer of *Jane Jacobs: Battle for the City* and a founder of the High Line elevated park in Chelsea, said he'd gotten confused about the time of the film's screening. He didn't stick around to answer questions later.

There is still much to learn from the pioneering and visionary work of Jane Jacobs. Her seminal book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, published in 1961, almost singlehandedly undermined the modernist, one-size-fits-all, top-down philosophy of urban planning that dominated the world after World War II. Instead, she celebrated human-scale neighborhoods, where people could make the connections that weave together a community. She insisted on fundamental values like democracy and broad participation in the city planning processes. She stood up and helped lead the successful resistance to New York City development czar Robert Moses' 1950s scheme to build a ten-lane "Lower Manhattan Expressway" from the Williamsburg Bridge to the Holland Tunnel, and bulldoze Washington Square Park for an onramp connected to Fifth Avenue.

"Jacobs saw the value of unity against those who had grand plans that were divorced from the reality of tenants in small apartments, parents wanting walkable streets for kids, and corner grocers who really knew their customers," Jeff Gold wrote in *Tenant/Inquilino*, the Metropolitan Council on Housing's newspaper, after Jacobs died in 2006. "She knew the value of rental housing and of the safety that comes from eyes on the streets."

Director Matt Tyrnauer engagingly

lays out the opposing ideologies and personalities that came into conflict during this period, using clear and concrete stories to trace the history and development of abstract

and complicated ideas. He brilliantly uses one simple anecdote to sum up the modernist school's vision of a city filled with massive blocks and towers of steel and glass: Le Corbusier, the French architect who was its most influential figure, had an epiphany as he was flying above Paris. From that height, he could see all the apparent chaos and disorder of the city streets and envisioned a symmetrical, sensible ordering of them, like a painter imagining beautiful designs to inscribe upon a canvas.

Robert Moses, who ruled virtually all public-works projects and major private developments in New York City from the 1930s to the 1960s, followed this philosophy. The film shows archival footage of him and urban planners standing around a room-sized model of the city, moving pieces here and there as though playing a game of chess or Monopoly. This illustrates the fundamental problem of the modernist dogma of urban design: perspective. If one is planning from 1,000 feet up, what is left out of your view? People. When a city is an abstract arrangement of objects and corridors, rather than a place where people live and work, communities and neighborhoods are shredded. One such neighborhood was East Tremont in the Bronx, where more than 1,500 households were evicted in 1954 to clear the way for the Cross-Bronx Expressway.

That is the legacy of Robert Moses, by and large, and the film minces no words about it.

Jane Jacobs wrote her observations on the effects of centralized urban planning at the height of Moses' power. These observations, and her propositions on how to plan differently, acted like a kind of radical virus, wending its way into the body politic of New York City, ultimately turning the city against

Moses' concepts. She started with very simple questions: How do people use the city? What makes a neighborhood safe? Who should get to decide how cities are planned? Her answers turned the prevailing norms on their head, and directly challenged the power of elites with the very radical and simple proposition that we ought to expect and demand democratic rule.

The film, however, doesn't even raise the subject of how democracy is circumscribed by the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few. It presents the tragedy of the Cross-Bronx Expressway and the victory against the Lower Manhattan Expressway as simple David vs. Goliath stories, bemoaning that Goliath won the first and celebrating that David won the second. East Tremont was a working-class neighborhood, heavily Jewish with a small but growing black and Latino population. Its denizens didn't have the social capital and po-

scale ideal are affordable only to the rich? Will the problems of inequality and bad urban planning be solved by a more enlightened managerial class, a benevolent cabal of well-heeled architects that merely offers better design? More community input?

City residents trying to sustain their communities face problems of power and resources, not merely design. As cities embrace public-private partnerships to fund the basic upkeep of parks — what should be the very definition of the commons — we cede control to elites. Design won't fix this. The High Line is beautifully designed, but who truly owns it if it's 95 percent funded by private individuals? One reason it was built, after all, was to stimulate luxury housing on the far West Side. Developments like Atlantic Yards are imposed from above as though Jane

**CIVIC WARRIOR:**  
Jane Jacobs,  
author of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

## IT'S JANE JACOBS VS. ROBERT MOSES, AGAIN

litical connections to fight off the most powerful man in the city. In *The Power Broker*, his epic biography of Moses, author Robert A. Caro speculates that if the community hadn't been decimated for the expressway, it might have become a model for peaceful racial integration. In the struggle against the Lower Manhattan Expressway, Greenwich Village's upper-middle-class residents did have the social capital and political connections. They joined up with the working-class people of the Lower East Side, perhaps the most fiercely organized and radical neighborhood in the city.

To tell this story and not bother to make this very basic observation about power is not merely an oversight. It erases the more radical implications of Jane Jacobs' insistence on democratic rule.

What do such omissions leave us? What happens when the neighborhoods closest to Jane Jacobs' human-

Jacobs never existed. Such injustices will continue as long as power remains concentrated in the hands of the few — the very problem that Jacobs addresses in her work. I wish that the filmmakers had chosen to examine this most fundamental and profound implication of Jacobs' writing and activism.

I also wish that the producer had stuck around, because there is one question that I would have liked to ask him: "What do you think Jane Jacobs would have thought about public-private parks such as the High Line, a park that you helped to found?"

*Citizen Jane: Battle for the City* is playing at the IFC Center at 323 6th Ave.

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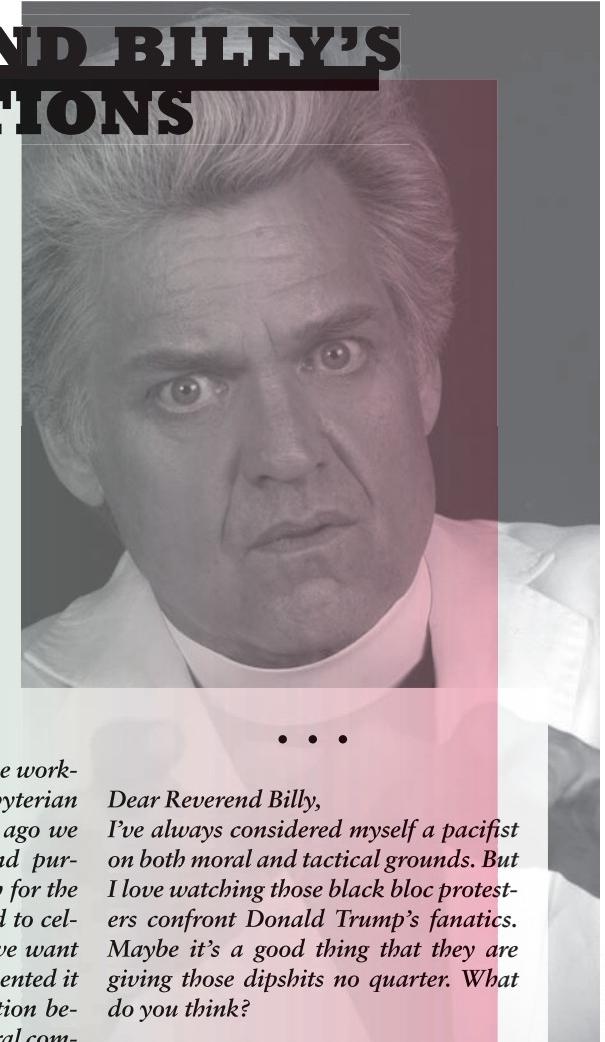
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## REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS



Dear Rev,

I'm a member of the social justice working group at my local Presbyterian church and a couple of months ago we pooled our money together and purchased a rainbow-colored bench for the church's garden. It was intended to celebrate the spirit of inclusivity we want our church to represent. We presented it as surprise gift to the congregation because we knew the church's central committee would otherwise not approve of it. It's not that they are bigots, per se, it's just that they want to stay out of politics. Making it a gift forced them to accept it. But it left members of the central committee bitter.

Now, there's talk of disbanding our social justice group. I love working for change with my fellow parishioners. We have been a big part of the drive for the national Presbyterian Church to divest from fossil fuels and we succeeded in getting the church to join the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement against illegal Israeli settlements. But squabbles like this over a bench make me want to throw in the towel.

What do you think Billy, should I stick to it or take my activism elsewhere?

— Thomas from Upstate

DEAR THOMAS,

Let us use George Segal's bench in Christopher Square as our touch point. The life-size lovers he sculpted there in the park are a marker of the sexual freedom that flourished in the West Village and to the revolution that was released at Stonewall Inn a few hundred feet up Christopher Street.

Your bench is resting in a setting of Calvinistic sexual fear — the tradition of your church. Don't just paint it with a rainbow. Perform the rituals of love there. Produce morality plays with gay and lesbian actors, costumes and music. Show your church elders some Radical Faerie Christianity and get down with some really fabulous worship.

Let the central committee have their "bitter feelings." I can hear them now: Look at that bench! Oh no! Here comes the sacred feminine! What next? Will Jesus of Nazareth introduce us to Mary of Magdala, his friend-with-benefits? Will Jesus wink suggestively at John, the Apostle "whom he loved," as the gospels say.

The life and times of free love in a church park — that's something we all need to see. Take your gestures and giggles and music out into the open air. Be gay and proud in your worship — make that bench your new altar!

Dear Reverend Billy,  
I've always considered myself a pacifist on both moral and tactical grounds. But I love watching those black bloc protesters confront Donald Trump's fanatics. Maybe it's a good thing that they are giving those dipshits no quarter. What do you think?

— Meredith in Kensington, Brooklyn

MEREDITH, why don't you lie down until the feeling passes.

The great project is peace. Find a way to enjoy peace more than war and you have begun to put 45 back in his cage at the top of Trump Tower.

There is a certain kind of pleasure in directly confronting the enemy. We are in such an indirect age, so much information flying about at high speeds. Environmentalists, anti-gentrification activists, people fighting against racism and xenophobia — it seems every kind of activist in 2017 is facing the riddle of the vanishing villain. It was such a relief when, this month, Citibank executives holding their shareholders' convention found the stage taken over by Lakota Sioux activists. The victims of the Dakota Access pipeline were there in person, swooping over the bankers with feathered capes, demanding their right to clean water, their right to exist.

Direct action is a hard thing to pull off in the information age. It is easy to live in the virtual world.

And then suddenly it happens — Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, Standing Rock. In an instant, the information age is working for activists. Those movements were like stages with the world in the audience. Why are these movements the showdowns that we needed? That is basically a mystery. But, Meredith, it wasn't violence that made it happen. All three were magnificent works of peace.

REVEREND BILLY IS AN ACTIVIST AND POLITICAL SHOUTER, A POST-RELIGIOUS PREACHER OF THE STREETS AND BANK LOBBIES. HE'S BEEN IN NEW YORK FOREVER WITH THE ACTIVIST PERFORMANCE GROUP THE CHURCH OF STOP SHOPPING. GOT A QUESTION FOR REVEREND BILLY? JUST EMAIL [REVBILLY@INDPENDENT.ORG](mailto:REVBILLY@INDPENDENT.ORG) AND UNBURDEN YOUR SOUL.



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